The SEVEN DIALS MYSTERY

By Agatha Christie

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INSTALMENT XIX.

THE STORY THUS FAR

Gerry Wade is found dead in bed at Chimneys, scene of a house party. Seven out of eight alarm clocks placed in his room to awaken him are lined up on a mantel. The guests are told that death resulted from an overdose of sleeping powder. Jimmy Thesiger and Ronny Devereux motor to Gerry's home to tell a sister, Loraine, of Wade's death.

Lady Eileen Brent, known as "Bundle," finds a letter Wade had written to his sister making reference to the Seven Dials. Bundle feels certain that Gerry was murdered. En route to London a man, mysteriously shot, staggers into the road in front of Eileen's car. It proves to be Devereux, who dying, whispers: "Seven Dials——tell——Jimmy Thesiger."

At Jimmy's quarters Bundle finds Loraine. The three of them set out to trail the murderer. From Captain Battle at Scotland Yard Bundle obtains a list of secret societies. That evening with Bill Eversleigh, she visits the Seven Dials Club. A watchman, Alfred, is recognized as a former footman at Chimneys.

Cabinet Minister George Lomax plans a party. He has received a warning letter from the Seven Dials Society. Bundle gets an invitation. Meantime she hides in the meeting room of the society and witnesses a meeting attended by masked members. She reports to Thesiger, who has also obtained an invitation to the Cabinet member's party. Among the guests is one Herr Eberhard, an inventor who has military plans of interest to the Air Ministry.

NOW CONTINUE THE STORY

"Well, don't you go and pour confidences into her shell-pink ear,' 'she remarked. "I'm going to bed. I was bored stiff in that drawing room and I'm not going back."

She left the room. Bill looked at Jimmy.

"Good old Bundle," he said. "I was afraid we might have trouble with her. You know how keen she is to be in everything. I think the way she took it was just wonderful."

"So did I," said Jimmy. "It staggered me."

"She's got some sense, Bundle has. She knows when a thing's plumb impossible. I say, oughtn't we to have some lethal weapons? Chaps usually do when they're going on this sort of stunt."

"I have a blue-nosed automatic," said Jimmy with gentle pride. "It weighs several pounds and looks most murderous. I'll lend it to you when the time comes."

Bill looked at him with respect and envy.

"What made you think of getting that?" he said.

"I don't know," said Jimmy, carelessly. "It just came to me."

"I hope we shan't go and shoot the wrong person," said Bill with some anxiety.

"That would be unfortunate," said Mr. Thesiger gravely.

JIMMY'S ADVENTURES

Our chronicle must here split into three separate and distinct portions. The night was to prove an eventful one and each of the three persons involved saw it from his or her own individual angle.

We will begin with that pleasant and engaging youth, Mr. Jimmy Thesiger, at a moment when he has at last exchanged final good-nights with his fellow conspirator, Bill Eversleigh.

"Don't forget," said Bill, "3 a.m. If you're still alive, that is," he added kindly.

"I may be an ass," said Jimmy, with rancorous remembrance of the remark Bundle had repeated to him, "but I'm not nearly so much of an ass as I look."

"That's what you said about Gerry Wade," said Bill slowly. "Do you remember? And that very night he——"

"Shut up, you damned fool," said Jimmy. "Haven't you got any tact?"

"Of course I've got tact," said Bill. "I'm a budding diplomatist. All diplomatists have tact."

"Ah!" said Jimmy. "You must be still in what they call the larval stage."

"I can't get over Bundle," said Bill, reverting abruptly to a former topic. "I should certainly have said that she'd be—well, difficult. Bundle's improved. She's improved very much."

"That's what your chief was saying," said Jimmy. "He said he was agreeably surprised."

Jimmy and Leopold

"I thought Bundle was laying it on a bit thick myself,' 'said Bill. "But Codders is such an ass he'd swallow anything. Well, night-night. I expect you'll have a bit of a job waking me when the time comes—but stick to it."

"It won't be much good if you've taken a leaf out of Gerry Wade's book," said Jimmy maliciously.

Bill looked at him reproachfully.

"What the hell do you want to go and make a chap uncomfortable for?" he demanded.

"You're only getting your own back," said Jimmy. "Toddle along."

But Bill lingered. He stood uncomfortably, first on one foot and then on the other.

"Look here," he said.

"Yes?"

"What I mean to say is—well, I mean you'll be all right and all that, won't you? It's all very well ragging, but when I think of poor old Gerry—and then poor old Ronny—"

Jimmy gazed at him in exasperation. Bill was one of those who undoubtedly meant well, but the result of his efforts would not be described as heartening.

"I see," he remarked, "that I shall have to show you Leopold."

He slipped his hand into the pocket of the dark blue suit into which he had just changed and held out something for Bill's inspection.

"A real, genuine, blue-nosed automatic," he said with modest pride.

"No, I say," said Bill. "Is it really?"

He was undoubtedly impressed.

"Stevens, my man, got him for me. Warranted clean and methodical in his habits. You press the button and Leopold does the rest."

"Oh!" said Bill. "I say, Jimmy?"

"Yes?"

"Be careful, won't you? I mean, don't go loosing that thing off at any one. Pretty awkward if you shot old Digby walking in his sleep."

"That's all right," said Jimmy "Naturally I want to get value out of Leopold now I've bought him, but I'll curb my bloodthirsty instincts as far as possible."

"Well, night-night," said Bill for the fourteenth time, and this time really did depart.

Jimmy was left alone to take up his vigil.

A Simple Task

Sir Stanley Digby occupied a room at the extremity of the west wing. A bathroom adjoined it on one side, and on the other a communicating door led into a smaller room, which was tenanted by Mr. Terence O'Rourke. The doors of these three rooms gave on to a short corridor. The watcher had a simple task. A chair placed inconspicuously in the shadow of an oak press just where the corridor ran into the main gallery formed a perfect vantage ground. There was no other way into the west wing, and anyone going to or from it could not fail to be seen. One electric light was still on.

Jimmy ensconced himself comfortably, crossed his legs and waited. Leopold lay in readiness across his knee.

He glanced at his watch. It was 1:20—just an hour since the household had retired to rest. Not a sound broke the stillness, except for the far-off ticking of a clock somewhere.

Somehow or other, Jimmy did not much care for that sound. It recalled things. Gerald Wade—and those seven ticking clocks on the mantle-piece—Whose hand had placed them there, and why? He shivered.

It was a creepy business, this waiting. He didn't wonder that things happened at spiritualistic seances. Sitting in the gloom, one got all worked up—ready to start at the least sound. And unpleasant thoughts came crowding in on a fellow.

Ronny Devereux! Ronny Devereux and Gerry Wade. Both young, both full of life and energy; ordinary, jolly healthy young men. And now, where were they? Dank earth—worms getting them—Ugh, why couldn't he put these horrible thoughts out of his mind?

He looked again at his watch. Twenty minutes past one only. How the time crawled.

Extraordinary girl, Bundle. Fancy having the nerve and the daring actually to get into the midst of that Seven Dials place. Why hadn't he had the nerve and the initiative to think of that? He supposed because the thing was so fantastic.

No. 7. Who the hell could No. 7 be? Was he, perhaps, in the house at this minute? Disguised as a servant. He couldn't surely, be one of the guests. No, that was impossible. But then, the whole thing was impossible. If he hadn't believed Bundle to be essentially truthful—well, he would have thought she had invented the whole thing.

Turned Light On

He yawned. Queer, to feel sleepy and yet at the same time strung up. He looked again at his watch. Ten minutes to two. Time was getting on.

And then, suddenly, he held his breath and leaned forward, listening. He had heard something.

The minutes went past— There it was again. The creak of a board — But it came from down stairs somewhere. There it was again! A slight, ominous creak. Somebody was moving stealthily about the house.

Jimmy sprang noiselessly to his feet. He crept silently to the head of the staircase. Everything seemed perfectly quiet. Yet he was quite certain he had really heard that stealthy sound. It was not imagination.

Very quietly and cautiously he crept down the staircase, Leopold clasped tightly in his right hand. Not a sound in the big hall. If he had been correct in assuming that the muffled sound came from directly beneath him, then it must have come from the library.

Jimmy stole to the door of it, listened, but heard nothing; then, suddenly flinging open the door, he switched on the lights.

Nothing! The big room was flooded with light. But it was empty.

Jimmy frowned.

"I could have sworn—" he murmured to himself.

The library was a large room with three windows which opened on to the terrace. Jimmy strode across the room. The middle window was unlatched.

He opened it and stepped out on the terrace, looking from end to end of it. Nothing!

"Looks all right," he murmured to himself. "And yet—"

He remained for a minute lost in thought. Then he stepped back into the library. Crossing to the door, he locked it and put the key in his pocket. Then he switched off the light. He stood for a minute listening, then crossed softly to the open window and stood there, Leopold ready in his hand.

Was there, or was there not, a soft patter of feet along the terrace? No—his imagination. He grasped Leopold tightly and stood listening.

In the distance a stable clock chimed two.

BUNDLE'S ADVENTURES

Bundle Brent was a resourceful girl—she was also a girl of imagination. She had foreseen that Bill, if not Jimmy, would make objections to her participation in the possible dangers of the night. Itw as not Bundle's idea to waste time in argument. She had laid her own plans and made her own arrangements. A glance from her bedroom window shortly before dinner had been highly satisfactory. She had known that the gray walls of the Abbey were plentifully adorned with ivy, but the ivy outside her window was particularly solid looking and would present no difficulties to one of her athletic propensities.

She had no fault to find with Bill's and Jimmy's arrangements as far as they went. But in her opinion they did not go far enough. She offered no criticism, because she intended to see to that side of things herself. Briefly, while Jimmy and Bill were devoting themselves to the inside of the Abbey Bundle intended to devote her attentions to the outside.

Her own meek acquiescence in the tame role assigned to her gave her an infinity of pleasure, though she wondered scornfully how either of the two men could be so easily deceived. Bill, of course, had never been famous for scintillating brain power. On the other hand, he knew, or should know, his Bundle. And she considered that Jimmy Thesiger, although only slightly acquainted with her, ought to have known better than to imagine that she could be so easily and summarily disposed of.

Ready For Action

Once in the privacy of her own rooom, Bundle set rapidly to work. First she discarded her evening dress, and the negligible trifle which she wore beneath it, and started again, so to speak, from the foundations. Bundle had not brought her maid with her, and she herself had packed. Otherwise, the puzzled Frenchwoman might have wondered why her lady took a pair of riding breeches and no further equine equipment.

Arrayed in riding breeches, rubber-soled shoes, and a dark-colored pull-over, Bundle was ready for the fray. She glanced at the time. As yet, it was only half-past 12. Too early by far. Whatever was going to happen would not happen for some time yet. The occupants of the house must all be given time to get off to sleep. Half-past one was the time fixed by Bundle for the start of operations.

She switched off her light and sat down by the window to wait. Functually at the appointed moment she rose, pushed up the sash and swung her leg over the sill. The night was a fine one, cold and still. There was starlight but no moon.

She found the descent very easy. Bundle and her two sisters had run wild in the park at Chimneys as small children, and they could all climb like cats. Bundle arrived in a flower-bed, rather breathless but quite unscathed.

She paused a minute to take stock of her plans. She knew the Air Minister and his secretary were in the west wing; that was the opposite side of the house from where Bundle was now standing. A terrace ran along the south and west side of the house, ending abruptly against a wall fruit garden.

(To be continued)

Could Not Sleep
HEADACHES
Were So Bad

Mrs. A. M. Arsenault, New Aberdeen, N.S., writes:—"For a period I had been troubled with headaches and they were so bad they kept me awake at night.

"I was advised by a friend, after having used many different kinds of medicine, to try

BURDOCK BLOOD BITTERS

"After taking three bottles I was completely relieved, and can recommend it to be a perfect medicine."

Put up only by The T. Milburn Co., Limited, Toronto, Ont.

FASHION FANCIES.

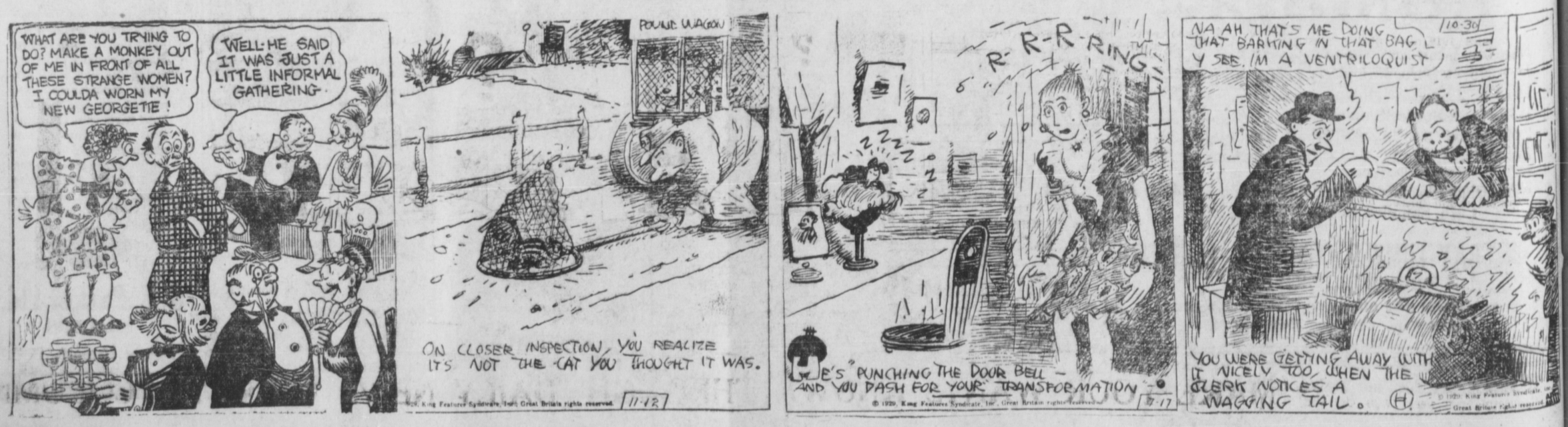
A group of very stylish fur-trimmed coats such as are worn on Fifth Avenue, New York.

Will Collect All Radio Licenses

It is understood that a drive is to be made in Prince Rupert for the collection of radio licenses. In several of the cities those not securing licenses have been sued in the police court and fined and a condition like this may occur here.

Licenses cost only a dollar and may be purchased from the post office, McRae Bros., the Kaiser Hardware, or the radio inspector.

ROUND HER FINGER

Samsonova, whose feats as a "strong woman" have been applauded by many thousands of circus-goers, has married Fernando, a contortionist well-known in vaudeville.—Milan Corriere della Sera.

Embarassing Moments